

Synthesis Of Public Comments From The March 2007 Workshops

DETERMINATION OF WHETHER ISSUE IS GOING TO BE CARRIED FURTHER IN THE REVISION EFFORT

(Under the 2008 Planning Rule)

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**Determination of Issues To Consider Further in the Revision Effort
(36 CFR 219.7(a)(5))**

I have reviewed the evaluations contained in the Comprehensive Evaluation Report (36 CFR 219.6). Likewise, I have listened to the public at the public meetings in March 2007 and Summer 2008 about their views on management of the George Washington National Forest.

I have also considered my personnel, time, and budget to do strategic planning. I have reviewed the issues raised by the public during these public meetings and those received electronically or through the mail. Based upon my review, there are some issues that shall not be considered further during the remainder of this revision effort. Those that shall not be further addressed are stated in the pages which follow.

The results of this review have led me to choose the following issues that shall be the focus for the remainder of this revision effort, including involving the public:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

This decision, on which issues shall be considered further through the remainder of this revision process, is not subject to objection (36 CFR 219.7(a)(5)). However, I also want to let the public know that during the formal 90-day comment period on the proposed revised plan (36 CFR 219.9(b)(1)(ii)), they may comment on any topic or issue and I may respond by adjusting the plan to address their comment(s).

MAUREEN HYZER
Forest Supervisor

DATE

INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes the public comments received during the March 2007 public meetings and subsequent public comment letters received either via the U.S. mail or electronically over the Internet.

This report's format follows that of the Comprehensive Evaluation Report of February 2007.

SYNTHESIZED SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS BY ISSUE

Issue 1. Biodiversity _____

A. Diversity

There are opposing views on whether an unmanaged natural forest can provide the same or better diversity of forest types and habitats than that created by active management of the land. Some folks believe active timber harvesting and fire are needed to achieve wildlife habitat, while others don't.

Others believe large blocks of land should be protected to promote natural processes. There should be no disturbances to the forest and no extractions unless it affects people's livelihood. They believe early successional habitat can be created by natural events. Some people like the fact that there are unmanaged, natural forests that promote natural processes, natural health, solitude, spiritual connection, clean water, and natural beauty.

Some people feel the Forest age classes are skewed toward an older age-class structure. Some people don't like that; stating that the stands are growing old and dying. They believe this skewed age class structure is detrimental to wildlife species that need younger age-classes to live. They believe a more balanced age-class structure is needed. They believe a balanced diversity of age class structures are needed for wildlife: a) 3-5 % in herbaceous habitat; b) 10-15 % in early successional habitat; c) 15-20 % in young growth (10-40 years old); d) 60-70% mast production habitat (40-120 yr.); and 10-15% old growth (120+ yr.) To do this, they want the agency to increase evenage timber harvesting, stating that selective harvesting of trees does not create an early successional forest.

Others believe that there are plenty of early successional habitats on private land for species, and even if not, this same habitat is continually being created naturally; or in the alternative selective harvest (un-evenage management) rather than even-age harvests could provide the necessary habitat. They believe, for instance, populations of neotropical birds are declining because of factors other than lack of early successional forests, and they don't need early successional habitat before they migrate south.

Some folks thought the Forest needs to provide more diverse habitat for wildlife through management activities like timber harvest and controlled burning. Some people felt the Forest's deer population is too high and is impacting its vegetation and biodiversity.

People believe the Forest is a biologically diverse temperate forest, including its diversity of forest types and habitats; the Forest provides a variety of habitats, especially for wildlife; and the Forest can provide islands of habitat that cannot be found on private lands.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

B. Old Growth

People like the fact that there are still fragments of old growth left on the Forest. They want them protected from any harvesting. They want to Forest to manage old growth the way it is being managed in the 2004 Revised Jefferson Forest Plan, following the Region's Guidelines. They want the patches of existing old growth connected into a network. Some also want buffers around old growth patches. However, some commented that they don't want to see the entire forest managed towards providing an old growth condition.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 2. Below Cost Timber Sales_____

Public comments relating to timber harvesting indicate that there are far greater “dislikes” than “likes”. However, this categorization oversimplifies the comments; for example several people indicated they disliked current timber management because they believed we should be harvesting more. Conversely, a few folks indicated they liked the current timber management due to large percentages of unsuitable land. Clearly the “like/dislike” categorization is not helpful in determining the true desires of the public as it relates to the timber program.

When we look at the comments themselves, we find a wide spectrum of opinions ranging from a desire not to harvest at all, through recognition that some harvesting is acceptable, to a desire to harvest more. Some folks desire no cutting on National Forests in order to; favor more natural forests, end road construction, avoid damaging roads, get rid of the deer feed lot mentality, and have fewer deer. Other folks believe we should do less harvesting; to curtail private timber industry interests on public lands, because the placement of logging slash can be a problem for recreation users such as horse riders, to avoid or reduce competition with the sale of timber by private landowners, because it is a money loser and an ecological loser, because long term trends indicate that an achievable timber objective is substantially lower than it has been, and to provide forested land where it is being lost on private lands due to urban development. Several comments encourage us to do more cutting to; create more early successional habitat or balance age class distributions, provide better wildlife habitat, promote new growth, reduce the effects of wildfire, compensate for higher mortality rates in an aging forest where decline is exceeding harvest, increase efficiency dollar-wise, meet a demand for construction and other industries, reduce or stop

imports of timber from other countries, provide increased exchange of carbon dioxide for oxygen thereby reducing any “greenhouse” effects, obtain a healthy forest, manage insects and diseases, and because trees are a renewable resource and operations are heavily regulated.

Comments falling between these two spectrums of no/less cutting and more cutting focused on a few issues specific to timber management. Several comments related to harvesting methods; again with a fairly wide spectrum. A few folks expressed a desire to reduce or stop clearcuts and high-grading because; it will result in healthier watersheds, they are difficult to walk through, of the lack of oak and/or hardwood regeneration, they cause erosion, it hurts the forest, and they are bad for flooding. Similarly, several folks encouraged more selective or ecologically sensitive harvesting because; they want bigger trees, multiple age classes, healthier forests, it may leave adequate cover for turkey and other wildlife, folks want to see horse logging, it is more economic, and they want more emphasis on natural logging. Other folks either stated that they loved clearcuts or that clearcutting was acceptable with limitations, e.g. below 2,500 feet and on slopes less than 15%. Some folks desire to see more diverse harvest methods that run the gamut of even and uneven-aged management, while others stated they want to see more even aged management in larger blocks. A concern that modified shelterwood harvest will not produce high quality veneer logs was expressed. Several folks desire to see harvesting in concentrated areas near existing roads or that we should keep cutting over the same areas, while others believe harvesting should be more dispersed. Other miscellaneous concerns include; daylighting in mature timber to establish regeneration, leaving more hard mast trees, cleaning up harvest areas or harvesting neatly, thinning in unmanaged pine stands should occur, we should pre-commercially thin to increase harvest species, managing for native species and using biological principles, ensuring the use of Best Management Practices, coordinating planning of harvests so that access roads can be more compatible with other uses (such as horse riders and trailers), and harvesting in older age classes versus younger age classes.

The economics of timber management received many comments. A concern that Forest Service timber sales undercut the timber market affecting the sale of timber on private lands was voiced. Some folks supported the timber program because; it is a source of wood, benefits the local economy, can contribute to clean bio-fuels from wood chips, and some rural communities depend upon logging. Increased timber harvesting was encouraged to provide economic benefits to counties through harvesting revenues, especially those counties where the land base has a lot of National Forest Land. Others pointed out that the Forest only provides 2-3% of the total harvest in the area. Some feel we should pay loggers more, while others state that loggers will pay more and that we should charge loggers more for wood or require loggers to pay fees to maintain roads. Several comments desire smaller sales and limiting helicopter logging to benefit smaller loggers and reduce the waste of wood product that results from helicopter logging. Several comments related to the efficiency of the timber program, stating that; we need to work more efficiently, management of areas suitable for timber production should only occur if the revenues are greater than the costs, we should have better economic management like private industry, logging should absorb its own costs, and we should not have below cost timber sales. A few comments indicated that logging should bring benefits back to the Forest beyond the removal of trees, such as invasive species control or trail maintenance.

Several folks disliked our salvage program indicating that cutting trees dying from gypsy moth would help regeneration, salvage should only occur if it positively contributes to the Desired Condition of the area, harvesting trees while they are growing brings more money than harvesting dead trees, and we should utilize timber before it dies.

Several folks indicated that we should plant more hardwoods or diverse species and rely less on natural regeneration. We should not plant pine. A concern for seeding in clearcuts was expressed.

There appears to be universal support for personal use dead and down permits (a.k.a. firewood permits). We received several comments that the public likes that personal use firewood and forest product permits are available to the public. No dislikes pertaining to personal use forest product permits were noted.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 3. Forest Access

A. System Roads Across the Forest

There are polarized divergent views on construction and management of roads for access to the National Forest.

Some people feel the National Forest is accessible year round to all ages for all public uses such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, horseback riding to name a few uses. They also like that there is access for firefighting and active management of the land. They believe there is ample trailhead parking facilities that are well maintained.

Some folks want more roads constructed and left open, especially of 4-wheel drive-type vehicles. Others want existing open roads closed and rehabilitated to reduce the road system to protect wildlife and decrease erosion. Others want existing closed roads to be open. Some hunters seem to want more roads open, especially after deer season.

Other hunters want a more primitive experience and prefer roads be closed to public vehicle use.

Some people want to keep existing roads (gates) open, saying the amount of roads open to motorized use is currently adequate. In essence, they are saying to keep the existing use of the roads as they are now, and historically opened roads should not be closed.

People do want an explanation of why roads are closed; saying road closure information should be available to the public.

Horseback riding individuals want gates open or wider paths beside gates for horses to get through. They also believe more opportunities need to be created for parking horse trailers.

Most public feel the agency does a good job of maintaining roads, saying agency roads are in decent shape.

The public wants us to replace culverts with culverts that allow for a natural stream bottom rather than a normal metal-bottomed culvert. When replacing culverts, an attempt should be made to use bottomless culverts.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

B. Access for Persons With Disabilities

People say that more access should be provided for handicapped (sic) folks. They want more road access for handicapped hunters and recreation, ATV or 4 wheeler access, opening gates through issuance of special use permits, access throughout the year, and accessible trails for hunters. They say the agency should not close roads or stop maintaining them because injured veterans are returning from war and more accessible facilities are needed to address the needs of people who can't currently experience the national forest.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 4. All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Use _____

See Access and Recreation discussions elsewhere in this document.

Issue 5. Roadless Area Management (Potential Wilderness) _

Many people like wilderness for escape and solitude and support designation of more wildernesses saying that the GW has only 4% of the forest currently designated. They say the existing wilderness is over used, there is no wilderness on the Lee RD, there is no wilderness in the West Virginia portion of the forest, wilderness is needed to protect old growth, and wilderness will bring revenue to communities. One comment suggests that 500,000 acres be designated. The area between US Routes 250 and 33 is specifically mentioned to be designated as wilderness.

On the other hand, many people want no more wildernesses. They say that users are aging, existing wilderness is underused, wilderness harbors disease, and wilderness will reduce revenue. Specific concern is for restrictions on motorized tools making trail maintenance difficult. Mountain bikers and hunters want wheeled vehicles and tools allowed.

One person recognizes that wilderness is part of multiple use.

People like the large, remote backcountry nature of the roadless areas. They like the scenic beauty and solitude and think that the roadless areas should be protected with no road building or logging allowed.

Shenandoah Mountain between US Routes 250 and 33 received several comments recommending management as a designated scenic area, as a designated wilderness, or as

a roadless area. It is described as the “...largest roadless area and should have permanent protection....”

Mountain bikers like using the roadless areas and want mountain bike use to be allowed. Some people mention that the 2001 roadless rule should be applied. One person says that the roadless area boundaries should be at the roads. Conversely, another says that areas adjacent to roads should be considered suitable for timber harvesting using existing roads and helicopters since the roads are in place.

No comments were against having the roadless areas. However, there were comments saying that the roadless areas should be kept out of wilderness or restrictive prescriptions that prevent active management.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 6. Special Management Areas _____

Some areas like Hidden Valley were specifically mentioned for special areas. Some people thought the dispersed trails in Hidden Valley are great. Some people wanted more land protection through special designated natural recreation areas. Some people want to protect the “gems” of the forest stating the areas are a resource for conservation and recreation and deserve special attention. They did not want these areas “managed with a heavy hand.” Some people wanted to establish specific areas for specific uses – i.e. hunting areas. Some people thought special areas should be protected from logging but dispersed recreation is ok. People liked management’s desire to preserve remoteness. People liked protection of the back country. The area known as Shenandoah Mountain was specifically mentioned as a special area due to its remoteness, roadless character, old growth, special biological sites and Ramsey’s Draft Wilderness.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 7. Aesthetics _____

People like the scenic resources of the forest and like that they are readily available. People like visual buffers and viewshed protection. They say there is a need to increase the use of scenic area designation with protection of Shenandoah Mountain specifically mentioned. People dislike the effect of logging operations on national forest saying that they leave a mess, that cutting units that do not look good should be kept as early succession by re-cutting them, and to remove patches of dead trees for scenic quality.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 8. Vegetation Manipulation _____

See also discussion of Multiple Use elsewhere in this document for opposing viewpoint.

It seems apparent that public comments are supportive of a need to address the reintroduction of chestnut blight resistant trees. One suggested the use of roads as sites for reintroduction. Conversely, a comment indicated that we need to introduce chestnut only after test plantings are made, and if successful, an assessment of the costs involved in restoration are considered. A related comment indicated that we need to look at research on how existing chestnuts in harvest units are responding to increased light.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 9. Resource Sustainability _____

A. Ecosystem Management (Healthy Forests)

A single comment was received that liked the managed viewsheds of different stages of vegetative growth and health on the Forest. A few comments were concerned with the danger of old trees that may be partly dead and falling on folks and indicated that we should deal with the aging forest in a controlled fashion. A somewhat related comment indicated that we should get light on the forest floor. A desire was expressed to understand detritus and nutrient cycling within the forest. A few comments stated the ecological benefits of healthy forests citing clean water and carbon sequestration. Finally, a few comments stated that we need more emphasis on ecosystem health and monitoring and cited brook trout as a key indicator of forest health.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

B. Soil Productivity

Some commenters like that ATVs are restricted to specific areas because they are concerned about illegal use damaging the land. Some dislike ATV use because they feel that it causes erosion and litter.

Some commenters feel that soil productivity should be better addressed in the Forest Plan.

Some commenters dislike cutting timber because they feel it causes soil erosion and that there is a lack of erosion control on harvested areas. Others dislike timber harvesting because they believe other resources like soil and water are not protected during harvesting operations.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

C. Water Quality

People believe that the Forest has good watershed and stream protection, many native brook trout streams, and good quality water for trout and drinking. They believe there is good cooperation concerning stream restoration and improvements for trout habitat.

People want watershed protection to continue to be a high priority; emphasizing protection of headwaters to prevent runoff and provide groundwater recharge. They agree with the Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER) that the revised plan should apply the Jefferson National Forest Revised Plan riparian standards, which has wider buffer distances and includes protection of headwater intermittent and ephemeral streams. Water quality and sedimentation is a concern; with some folks saying activities that pollute water should be restricted near streams (timber harvest, prescribed burns, herbicide use). They want the agency to use Wilderness and Roadless Area designations to protect water quality, in particular, municipal water supplies.

There is concern over flooding, with the public's rationale being that management practices lead to larger run-off, which leads to flooding. People feel there is a need for more water impoundments in Shenandoah County for recreation and flood control.

A few people emphasized the need to address fish passage, including fixing culverts and designing crossings with natural stream bottoms.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

D. Vegetation Management

Public comments identified many positive aspects of the current management of the Forest. The use of timber management, prescribed fire, and good access for wildlife improvement and even enhancing sensitive species is a common thread. Light management and use of Best Management Practices on the Forest was cited positively. A comment indicated that the size and dispersion of vegetation management sites is liked.

Conversely, many comments indicated that we should increase and/or diversify timber harvests to increase benefits to wildlife. The interaction of vegetation management and wildlife habitat is a strongly recurrent theme. Many comments indicated that we should be treating more acres and increasing our early successional habitat (ESH). Desired conditions

related to ESH and Old Growth need to be clearly defined; perhaps as high as 10-15% of the area should be in ESH. We should also increase the use of fire, especially following timber sales, and should protect old growth. A need for more small clearings and a mosaic of land patterns are needed. We should intensively manage areas identified as suitable for timber harvest to provide high quality timber. A comment indicated that during harvest operations we should protect water, soil, and recreation during site specific analysis. We should plan to establish new hardwood growth. A comment indicated that we should propose an ash tree initiative.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

E. Fire

A few people don't want to agency to allow lightning-started fires to burn. They want us to suppress these natural fires, even though the fire may be in a designated wilderness. Otherwise, most people believe naturally-ignited fire should be allowed to burn, especially in wilderness and roadless areas.

Some people like prescribed burning, while others question it use. Those that like the activity mentioned it is a way to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat, clean up the forest "floor", silviculturally regenerate oak, and for other ecological reasons.

Others don't believe the agency should be increasing this fuel reduction activity to prevent wildfire. They believe the justification of the prescribe burn program is completely out of line with science or based on dubious, unsubstantiated science. They also believe the size and frequency of fires is too high (Agency is burning too much too often.) They believe burns are not done the same way as native Americans did them; the program being budget driven, not needs driven.

People also do not want the agency to damage or destroy the existing trail system when we either suppressing a wildfire or having a prescribed burn. They believe there is too much damage to single-track trails during suppression or prescribed burns without any post-burn rehabilitation or restoration to its nearly original state. They feel the cost of trail restoration after being used by a bulldozer is high (\$15M to \$30M per mile), so it needs to be avoided, or the cost of rehabilitation / restoration needs to be borne by the fire program, not the recreation program. Preparing trails for burns should be done with hand tools by qualified fire and recreation personnel rather than bulldozers. In essence the agency should not use trails as control lines without restoring them to near their original state.

For either suppression or prescribed burning, the public believes natural terrain features should be used to control fires rather than constructing control lines with bulldozers. Some feel those firelines constructed with bulldozers are not restored, causing soil loss and sedimentation.

Where people agree on the use of prescribed burning, and the need for control lines, they still would like us to:

- Avoid the use of bulldozers in roadless areas.

- Avoid the use of bulldozers to disturb the existing trail system, or use smaller and lighter machinery and restore the trail to near its original width after the burn is completed. Avoid burning inside wild turkey nesting season.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

F. Air

The public says there should be more trees and fewer disturbances to improve air quality because of the positive effects the forest acreage has on the carbon cycle and air cooling through the transpiration of trees.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 10. Minerals and Energy _____

Some like no gas leasing in Laurel Fork area on Warm Springs RD. Some dislike mining or drilling on the Forest. Some prefer use of woody biomass for energy instead of just burning in prescribed burns.

A few people want to see areas on the Forest designated for wind energy development, generally because it is a clean energy source, and could be used to generate money to manage the rest of the Forest. Others aren't opposed to wind energy development, but just not on the National Forest; or preferred them on the National Forest as a last resort. Others are opposed to wind energy development on the Forest. Those opposed to wind development on the National Forest area; concerned about the impacts of ridgetop towers on migrating birds and bats and on visual quality. They also feel development would cause too much noise and also fragment habitats; thus wanting to maintain the forests continuity.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 11. Forest Pests and Invasive Species _____

Public comments indicated a few “dislikes” related to herbicide use. However, many of these comments appear to be in favor of using more herbicides or to make it easier to use herbicides in the control of invasive species. A comment also suggested including the use of herbicides as a monitoring item for the Forest Plan. Dislikes included the use of herbicides for roadside maintenance and in areas too close to water sources.

No comment expressed a “like” regarding invasive insect species. One comment indicated a need for more analysis and discussion regarding insect pests in light of developing threats by a variety of pests and invasive species. A vast majority of the comments received expressed dissatisfaction with our management of invasive insect pests, especially the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). Comments indicated that we should attempt to save hemlocks and need better control of the HWA, making that a high priority. A comment alleges that we consider hemlock not as important as oak, with reference to our emphasis on gypsy moth control. A few comments also encouraged us to provide for control of the gypsy moth. One commenter pointed out that older trees are insect havens. Finally, a concern for addressing an increased incidence of insect borne diseases for people living at the edge of the Forest was expressed.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 12. Adequacy of the Revision _____

A. Process

Divergent views exist on the use of NEPA, with Categorical Exclusions (CEs) being either used as much as possible or eliminated. The 1993 revision effort followed a good NEPA process with an EIS completed that included alternatives. They believe the agency made a bad decision to use CE for this latest Plan revision. They want an EIS to be completed so effects of management activities are known. They also contend that some site-specific decisions should be made in the Plan.

Some stated the Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER) was more off-target on the recommendations than on-target; therefore it needs to consider more of what was said in the Southern Appalachian Assessment. The public says maps need to be available at public meetings.

The newly revised Plan needs to be as specific as the 1993 Plan about what can and cannot be done, including binding standards for project implementation. The new Plan may be too vague or not specific enough. The new Plan should not eliminate the Management Area or Management prescription concept. Plan suitability maps should show where a use cannot occur, rather than where they can occur.

Some want this GW Revised Plan to be more consistent than or as similar as possible with the 2004 Jefferson Revised Plan. They want specific goals and objectives to be set, such as for age-class distribution. The decision on the Plan needs to be based on science and sustainability, taking a long-term view, rather than on budget; it should not be based on politics or influenced from or by higher level officials within the agency.

Others judge the 1993 Revised Plan was good, but it wasn't implemented correctly. They contend the 1993 Plan was flexible to manage at the site-specific level and was based on science. It contained Management Areas; each with their own desired conditions and standards; Plan maps were good; and it had an Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ).

People do want the revision effort to improve communication with the public, as not everyone has a computer. Therefore, they do not want attempts to decrease public input in the revision effort.

Some conclude that a broader perspective needs to be considered, such as private land activities, or from a state-wide perspective.

Some folks want the Plan to formulate a process to facilitate adding trails to the trails inventory; while others say public participation is needed in the inventory of potential wilderness areas.

The local public likes the opportunity to comment on site-specific projects, feeling that agency scoping notices have good clarity, provide timeframes and have good maps.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

B. Monitoring

Neotropical migrants should be monitored rather than songbirds or the birds discussed in the CER. Appropriate bird species should be selected for monitoring of the more mature forest conditions. The agency needs to do a better job of monitoring to see if desired conditions were achieved. Let the public know what is happening. Monitoring should not just monitor extraction; it should also monitor to see that agency doesn't need to manage. Monitoring of streams and songbirds across habitats is good.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

Issue 13. Mix of Goods and Services _____

A. Multiple Use

People generally feel the agency needs to be realistic and spend taxpayer dollars wisely.

The public believes there needs to be more of a balance between recreation, timber and wildlife programs. They don't want the forest locked up for any one use, be it wilderness or timber. They want the agency to be firm about multiple use, managing for everyone's interest, being careful not to overuse the Forest. While there is support for multiple use, some want more money returned to the Counties, some want the Forest to be managed as it currently is, and some want increased protection of special areas, making core areas wilderness since there is so little now. Some feel the agency should manage for ecological objectives rather than financial objectives. Others feel there should be a better balance between suitable and unsuitable lands.

Some want the Plan to be flexible to see if natural occurrences produce the desired results that can be also achieved through manmade intervention.

Some like the multiple use management of the Forest and want public land available to all citizens of the United States. Some say there is plenty of room for all publics to use for activities such as mountain biking, hiking in remote areas or wilderness, camping in a developed campground, special use events, hunting and fishing, and viewing scenery. They also believe the forest can be managed in a sustainable way now and into the future by using timber harvesting and prescribed burning. To them multiple use means providing different needs for timber, fire, recreation, wildlife, air, and water. They reflect that healthy forests are the result of multiple use management; it is one of a shared use concept; and if it isn't broke, don't attempt to fix it. They recognize that it doesn't mean that every use occurs on every spot. They believe the Forest should be managed in the interests of all users.

People love the fact that there is over 1 million acres of National Forest, a vast expanse. They said that Virginia is lucky to have so much National Forest. They like that it provides access for a large number of people. They liked the fact that the Forest is not a private enterprise in that it is open for all to enjoy. They are proud that there was historic foresight to purchase the land to protect watersheds and provide timber. They believe the Forest is not overcrowded and does not have too many structures; there is a nice sense of space. They like that there are choices of where to go and the liberty to go there. The Forest is family-friendly.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

B. Developed Recreation (Developed and Dispersed)

People like the diversity of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities on the forest, mentioning virtually every type of recreation opportunity out there. Some, but certainly not all, activities mentioned are: camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, mountain biking, motorized trail use (ATV/OHV), rock climbing, horseback riding, and shooting ranges.

People liked that the forest provides vast hunting and fishing opportunities, often within a couple of miles from a used road. Hunting opportunities on National Forest land were appreciated due to high quality forest management practices.

A lot of folks want more opportunities for activities such as short and long loop trails, equestrian trails and parking facilities, and campsites at specific locations. Of note, the Great Eastern Trail is favored by many. Some want more motorized use trails and others want fewer or none saying that ATVs and dirt bikes are inappropriate on the National Forest. Many like multiple use trails, those for pedestrian as well as mountain biking and equestrian use. Then others say non-motorized users should be separated, suggesting that mountain bikers and horses cause erosion.

Many people emphasized the positive economic benefits of outdoor recreation. They said that tourism brings money spent in communities. Others point out that tourism does not equal the jobs and economic impact provided by the timber industry, with it bringing in more than recreation-related jobs.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

C. Wildlife

See also the Diversity discussion elsewhere in this report.

While a lot of people felt there is a need for greater acreage of early successional habitat for declining species on the National Forest; a few felt there was not a need because private lands provide this habitat. While folks said that we should look at private lands, they reminded the agency that only the landowner has control over habitat conditions on private lands and the future use of those lands.

Hunters felt a lot more "food plots" need to be created, re-established, or maintained on the Forest, similar to the Forest's existing wildlife openings.

A lot of folks thought that wildlife habitats are not balanced on the Forest. While some think there are enough food sources for species such as deer and grouse, others believe the agency should designate areas for quality deer management. There is a diversity of opinion on whether deer habitat and populations are decreasing, increasing or stable on the George Washington National Forest. At least one person stated that hunting regulations make more difference in deer numbers than actual timber management on the Forest.

There are polarizing viewpoints on whether the agency should do more or less active management for wildlife. People either want more active wildlife management and less wilderness, or more wilderness or undisturbed areas and less active wildlife management.

People liked that the agency seeded and planted after management activities occurred.

While hunted species were continuously discussed, people did like our focus on non-game species and would like that to continue.

Some people contend the Forest Service needs to tie public lands together to provide contiguous habitat corridors for wildlife.

Some people want the agency to do something about coyotes, like allowing coyote hunting on the National Forest year-round.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

D. Land Ownership

People believe the agency should do a better job of marking the Forest boundary so people know where private land is. Some don't want the agency to sell any National Forest System land. Others are concerned with how management of isolated tracts would be addressed in the plan, given the current possibility of selling those tracts.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

E. Special Uses

People like it that special use (authorizations) permits can be obtained at a low cost. However, some want a more flexible fee structure for Outfitter and Guide permits.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

NEW ISSUES IDENTIFIED AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

A. BUDGET _____

Many people wanted to see more funding for National Forest management. Some wanted increased funding for particular resource areas such as: law enforcement, recreation, historic interpretation, and road management.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

B. ECONOMICS _____

One comment identified the positive role of the rural development program for communities. Another comment asked for the consideration of the economic benefits of all National Forest resources to communities, not just the benefits generated by commodities.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

C. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION _____

Numerous comments identified the need for more educational and interpretive programs that include scientific concepts, such as forest ecology and elements of biodiversity, as well as social concepts, such as leave-no-trace and anti-littering ethics. They assert science-based education is needed to address misinformation that is politically-based. Greater knowledge of resource programs and regulations, for example understanding the difference between management and preservation or the costs and financial benefits of timber sales,

is also needed. Demonstration areas were suggested for highlighting the rationale and visualizing the effects (both good and bad) of management such as timber silvicultural activities, multiple use areas, and the need for early successional habitat. Corridors such as the Appalachian Trail and roadways could provide places for signs describing benefits and reasons for management (example, road closed for wildlife nesting season). Programs and field trips developed for visitors and children were specifically emphasized. One comment recognized the environmental education efforts that involved schools, children, teachers, Forest Service personnel and local citizens during the Capitol Holiday Tree project. People reason the National Forest is a great outdoor classroom and environmental education should continue.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

D. HERITAGE _____

People like historic areas. Some people like the protection and education of cultural heritage resources while others feel the Forest Service needs to protect archeological, cultural and historic sites more in all actions. People feel the Forest Service should manage and protect historic agricultural and industrial sites. People would like to see more interpretation of historic resources, especially interpretive services and signs for Civil War sites like Signal Knob. Some would like the agency to develop a partnership with the Civil War Battlefield Commission. A few believe the agency needs to be more careful with fossils and artifacts.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

E. LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SAFETY _____

Many of the comments related to law enforcement were specifically directed at the illegal use of off-highway vehicles and all-terrain vehicles in both authorized and unauthorized areas; asking for greater enforcement of current laws, increased fines and a higher presence of officers. Unauthorized ATV use also affects private lands. Other comments were more general but also suggested the need for better enforcement, more officers and game wardens, and more laws (for example, blaze orange for hunting). An additional comment was made that law enforcement officers and rangers should be more aware of laws and hunting seasons. One comment was that law enforcement has been helpful when needed. One commenter requested enforcement of properly functioning spark arrestors on all internal combustible engines and fire extinguishers in all vehicles and ATVs.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

F. PARTNERSHIPS

People like the fact that the Forest Service has good cooperation with many partners such as The Nature Conservancy, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF), West Virginia Department of Natural Resources (WVDNR), Virginia Trout Stream Sensitivity, Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and Shenandoah Mountain Bike Club. People feel there is good communication between the Forest Service and partners. There is good cooperation between trail user groups and the Forest Service is involved with different user groups.

Volunteers find it rewarding to be involved maintaining resources; as one person put it, you “care for something you own.” Hunters and others keep trails open. They acknowledged the Forest Service helps promote use of volunteers and is willing to make presentations to groups. There are many diverse opportunities for volunteers. Volunteers and user groups wanted to know how they can support the needs of the national forest. Volunteers feel there are too many roadblocks and policies are too restrictive. There needs to be more opportunities for volunteers – especially horse users and sportsmen groups. There should be a “Friend of the Forest Service” group.

Some people like the strong partnerships between the Forest Service and state agencies such as, VDGIF, VDOF and WVDNR. Some people feel there should be more emphasis on cooperation between agencies stating a lack of coordination on wildlife populations and habitat needs. The Forest Service should continue to work with and use studies developed by the state agencies and listen to state biologists.

Volunteers and user groups like maintaining and rehabilitating trails and they are heavily involved in trail maintenance. They appreciate the good relationship between the Forest Service and trail groups. They like the opportunities for cycling and mountain bike groups to maintain trails. They like access to Forest Service leadership and public involvement for volunteer work. Four wheel drive groups have a trail patrol program which helps provide information to the Forest Service. However, volunteers and user groups would like it to be easier to get work done. Some suggested Adopt-a-Trail programs. Volunteers and user groups said infrastructure maintenance is below par (realizing a shortage of dollars). There is a need for more supervision of inmate trail crews. Lack of supervision has caused mistakes leading to damage to trails. There is a need for more organized trail maintenance trips – have more days for Forest Service and volunteers. The Forest Service should continue and increase use of ATC and other volunteers for maintaining trails.

People like to volunteer and like the fact that volunteer agreements provide coverage for potential injuries. Volunteers appreciate the Forest Service providing training and certification for chainsaw and crosscut saws, first aid and CPR. Some would like the Forest Service to provide more training and certification opportunities.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

G. PERSONNEL

Many people appreciated the Forest Service personnel that they have dealt with. Many people noted that they wanted the Forest managed by Forest Service personnel and not contractors. Comments also identified the need for more Forest Service employees and the need for programs such Senior Citizen Employment Program and Youth Conservation Corp. One person identified a concern with the autonomy of District Rangers.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

H. TRASH

Many people see the Forest becoming littered by various items that ruin the forest experience for many users. They want more law enforcement, trash pickup, trash cans at parking lots, and dumpsters for deer carcasses. They want the agency to continue the "Pack It In – Pack It Out" environmental education program.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort

I. USER FEES

Some felt that the National Forest Stamp fund was needed and useful to help pay for wildlife and fisheries habitat work. Some questioned how and where the funds are being used, and whether a \$3.00 fee is realistic. Others felt that hunters are taxed too much and there should not be a National Forest stamp for hunting and fishing.

Other public thought there should be equal user fees for all users of the forest, especially dispersed recreation use (like hiking, biking), similar to the National Forest Stamp for hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Some people would like to see a user fee or access fee for all forest users – not just hunting and fishing (NF stamp). People feel user fees should stay on the forest and not go to the Federal treasury. Other people feel user fees are not appropriate – it's a public forest and there should be free access. Some people would support user fees if they are used for maintaining and improving fish and wildlife habitat and road and trail maintenance. Forest users contribute to the local economy, even if they don't pay a fee. There was also a suggestion to trade volunteer work for fees.

Agency's Determination and Reasoning of Whether Issue Will Be Considered Further in this Revision Effort